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ABSTRACT

This literature review provides an overview of the impact of dual careers on family and family therapy. The dual career family currently represents the most common married unit. Because both work and family stress impact psychological well-being variables such as depression and self-esteem, family and work can not be understood as two separate and distinct domains. Rather, they must be considered interactionally and interdependently. The impact of dual career lifestyle encompasses all family members. Family therapy, with its emphasis on family interactions and interconnectedness, provides a clinical framework for addressing the issues inherent in dual career lifestyles. This review of the literature covers topics including the impact of dual-career lifestyle on family relationships, issues for women in dual career families, issues for men in dual career families, and the impact on children. Implications for family therapy are also discussed. The literature suggests that family therapists have three fundamental responsibilities for counseling dual career families. Family therapists assist families in negotiating roles, values, and traditions; advocate for family support in the work environment; and, consult organizations about system dysfunctions. Themes in family counseling relating to dual career families include boundaries between self and others, expectations about roles and responsibilities, shared decision making, support, and marital intimacy. (Contains 53 references.) (GCP)

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Running Head: IMPACT OF DUAL CAREER ON FAMILY AND THERAPY

Dual Career Families:

A Family Therapy Perspective

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Since 1970, the number of families with both parents working has increased sharply (Brown, Graves, & Williams, 1997; McGoldrick, 1999; Stoltz-Loike, 1992; Ulione, 1996). The dual career family currently represents the most common married unit, and it crosses all class and ethnic groups. Sixty percent of all married couples experience the dual career lifestyle (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). The "traditional" family unit with a provider husband and a homemaker wife represents less than three percent of the American households (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Thus, young adults face the challenge of balancing family and work responsibilities and of finding equality among gender role expectations.

In terms of economics, research indicates that dual earner families do enjoy economic advantages in income and home ownership (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Lower and middle income families experience more benefits and fewer costs than upper income families (Hanson & Ooms, 1991). The health of dual career couples is bolstered by the presence of two incomes. As Barnett and Rivers argue, "because they have two incomes that help them buffer against the terrible wrenches of a changing economy, they do not feel the gut-wrenching vulnerability of standing at the edge of a precipice, ready at any second to topple off the cliff if a company downsizes or relocates" (p. 2). Hence, the anxiety of economic uncertainty is minimized by two full incomes. Despite the advantages associated with dual-career couples, some research suggests decreased satisfaction. Time and economic satisfaction is associated with "traditional" family lifestyles in which the father is breadwinner and the mother is homemaker significantly more than with dual career lifestyle (Baker, Kiger, & Riley, 1996).

Work conflict is the strongest predictor of family conflict (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). For women, marital adjustment has a significant impact on commitment to work. For men, the family environment has the most impact on their commitment to work (Ladewig, 1990). Both job and family stress impact psychological well-being variables such as depression and self-esteem (Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). Thus, family and work can not be understood as two separate and distinct domains, but they must be considered interactionally and interdependently (Higgins, Duxbury, & Irving, 1992). The impact of dual-career lifestyle encompasses all family members. Family therapy, with its emphasis on family interactions and interconnectedness (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998), provides a clinical framework for addressing the issues inherent in dual-career lifestyles.

The Impact of Dual-Career Lifestyle on Family Relationships

In regards to the impact of dual-career lifestyles on family relationships, the literature suggests four fundamental issues, namely marital power and decision making, marital happiness, division of household labor, and child care (Feree, 1991; Granello & Navin, 1997; Lewis, Izraeli, & Hootsmans, 1992; McBride & Mills, 1993; Schwartz & Scott, 1994). First, in terms of decision making, money translates into power. Thus, when both spouses work, the traditional pattern of male dominance in the relationship shifts to one of greater equality as demonstrated through joint decision making. The pattern of women gaining more power as a result of economic contribution is evident across racial and ethnic groups (Schwartz & Scott). The dual career lifestyle contributes to a shift in marital power as decisions are made jointly.

Second, in terms of marital happiness, research provides contradictory findings (McGoldrick, 1999). Some studies conclude that homemakers are happier than working wives. In these studies, the level of satisfaction for working women depended on the quality of jobs they held as opposed to working itself. Other research indicates that working wives report higher levels of marital happiness than homemakers as well as less depression (Lewis et al., 1992). Interestingly, men tend to report the same level of happiness independent of whether the household was single career or dual career.

Research concludes that the significant factors for marital happiness include spousal agreements on work and family roles and opportunities for "couples time" (Granello & Navin, 1997; Stoltz-Loike, 1992). If a husband and wife disagree on whether both of them should be working, then tension and strain on the relationship develops. Agreement on spousal employment is an important indicator of marital happiness. Another example of incongruent expectations is when a spouse is forced to work due to economic necessity. If one spouse wanted and expected to stay at home and was subsequently required to work, the spouse could experience resentment and frustration, thereby compromising marital happiness. Congruent expectations and value systems are necessary for resolving conflict about the dual career lifestyle and its ramifications (Silberstein, 1992).

One of the significant disadvantages reported by dual career couples is the restriction on time for recreation and leisure as a couple and as a family (Stoltz-Loike, 1992). Marital happiness depends largely on the opportunity to spend time together. Unfortunately, the demands of work as well as housework and

child care restrict the amount of time remaining for recreational pursuits. To maximize marital happiness, the balance between family and work must include opportunities for couples' time (Schwartz & Scott, 1994).

Third, research finds that the division of labor is based largely on the gendered expectations that wives and husbands bring to the issue of housework (Ferree, 1991). Thus, factors such as family of origin and socialization agents have implications for the development of these expectations. The role models that men and women encounter as children as well as the gender messages of society impact how wives and husbands understand their responsibility in the family environment. Dual-career couples tend to have minimal, if any, exposure to role models demonstrating successful role sharing and balancing (Sperry, 1993). Research indicates that husbands do less than ¼ of the household work, and housework continues to be gender segregated as men tend to do outside work and home repair (Nock & Kingston, 1988). The unequal distribution of role responsibilities contributes to women experiencing higher levels of role conflict than men (Wiersma & Van den Berg, 1991). The literature consistently supports the notion that within dual-career lifestyles women are primarily responsible for household tasks and child rearing tasks (Anderson & Spruill, 1993; Gottfried, Gottfried, Bathurst, & Killian, 1999; Hilton & Haldeman, 1991; Huppe & Cyr, 1997; Schwartzberg & Dytell, 1996). Thus, the increased role demands outside the home have not been managed by a redistribution of role responsibilities within the home (Duxbury & Higgins, 1991).

As a consequence of the imbalance in the division of household labor, working women tend to experience role overload (Granello & Navin, 1997; Stoltz-Loike, 1992). Not only are men engaging in less household responsibility, but the tasks that they do complete are infrequent and sporadic. Women are responsible for the daily chores that contribute to the smooth functioning of the family. The responsibility placed on the working wife has created an experience described as "working the second shift." After completing a full shift at work, women return home to another shift of cleaning and handling household responsibilities (Schwartz & Scott, 1994). Role overload for women results in less free time for taking care of themselves and in a diminished sense of well-being (Stanfield, 1996). Wives whose husbands do their

share of housework are more satisfied with marriage than are other wives. Families with clear and equitable divisions of household labor tend to function smoothly and more efficiently.

Fourth, the dual career lifestyle impacts the family in terms of child care. Although men are being more involved in child care, both working and non-working wives continue to do the majority of child care. Research indicates that mothers participate in child rearing activities at a significantly higher rate than fathers in both single-earner and dual-earner families. The majority of the mother's interaction time with child entailed doing functional activities (McBride & Mills, 1993). For women, having children tends to constrain their labor market activities. For example, mothers are more likely to take time off work after delivery, to have breaks in their career in order to raise children, to be less focused on career advancement and more focused on flexibility, and to interrupt work tasks if the child is sick or off school.

In some dual career families, split shift employment occur in which the parents work two different shifts in order to provide parental child care at all times. Such an arrangement prevents parents from spending time together which has been identified as a factor impacting marital happiness. On a more positive side, children do benefit from their parents taking equal roles in child rearing responsibilities (Hamburg, 1992). If the dual career couple can not rely on themselves or other family and friends for child care, they are forced to consider child care facilities. Unfortunately, the facilities have limited availability and high costs. The United States is about the only industrialized country that does not have a national policy on child care. Subsequently, parents are not ensured the availability or the proficiency of child care facilities. Regardless of the child care arrangement in dual career families, the bulk of current research concludes that children who receive quality child care experience minimal, if any, negative consequences of the dual career lifestyle (Chambliss, 1996; Stoltz-Loike, 1992).

Issues for Women in Dual Career Families

In conjunction with marital power, marital happiness, division of labor, and child care factors, there are specific issues faced by women in dual career families. First, in comparison to women of earlier generations, college educated women today assume that both career and family experiences are possible (Hallett & Gilbert, 1997). The ideology that a choice must be made between the two experiences no

longer exists. The manner in which women now perceive career is intimately connected to their beliefs about balancing family and work roles.

Second, research indicates that in dual career families women tend to compromise more frequently and more consequentially to make the lifestyle work (Apostal & Helland, 1993). Therefore, to ensure the functioning of the dual career arrangement, women are more likely to take on additional responsibilities and to sacrifice their own goals and dreams. Research indicates that work is as critical to a woman's well-being as to a man's well-being (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). The literature suggests that women who work experience higher levels of psychological well-being and adjustment than women who do not work (McGoldrick, 1999). Involvement in a career serves to enhance a woman's sense of self, but it also impacts her involvement with her family.

As mentioned previously, having children restricts a working woman's labor market activities. For women who interrupt their careers for family responsibilities, discontinuities in experience and earnings can result in decreased financial stability and in diminished skill levels. Parcel and Menaghan (1994) argue that "despite the time pressures that employed mothers with young children face, their work investments pay off in long-term child welfare both because of enhanced material well-being but also because of the social capital that such employment brings to family socialization" (p. 170). Thus, the disadvantages of women waiving employment may be underestimated.

Third, Barnett and Rivers (1996) argue that women are not experiencing the high depression and anxiety characteristic of women in the 1950's. Women continue to experience more role overload and interference in work responsibilities than men (Duxbury, Higgins, & Lee, 1994). Despite the role overload resulting from household and child rearing responsibilities, modern women are capable of balancing their work and family tasks effectively. Although busy and involved in conflicting roles, women are reporting satisfaction with the dual career lifestyle.

Fourth, even though a woman's right to work is widely accepted in society, the emphasis is placed on a woman's choice which obscures the reality of working due to economic necessity.

> Myths about women's 'choices' of work and family balance also serve to disadvantage dual earner women at home and in the workplace. . . the belief embedded in many cultures that women have a

> free choice of family and employment roles assigns responsibility for the inferior position of women in the workforce, their lower income in comparison to men, and their domestic overload, to women themselves and serves to conceal the structures of power which constrain them (Lewis et al., 1992, p.8).

Therefore, as women struggle to balance work and family, their experience is shaped in the framework of society. Such a framework attributes inequality in the workforce to the woman herself rather than to institutional and structural factors. Accordingly, women receive little support for the gender discrimination in division of labor, earning power, and career advancement.

Issues for Men in Dual Career Families

Family-work issues are no longer restricted to the female experience (Kushnir, Malkinson, & Kasan, 1996). There are several issues faced by men in dual career families. From a systems perspective, multiple levels such as individual, family, and work environment contributed to the stress experienced by men attempting to balance the demands of dual-career lifestyle (Berry & Rao, 1997).

Gilbert (1985) conceptualizes men in dual-career families in two categories, namely traditional and role sharing. In describing traditional husbands, Gilbert notes that they "accept the wife has a career, feel little sense of competition with her, and are generally pleased with her professional achievements. But their attitudes toward sex roles are more traditional: that the husband's career is preeminent, that the wife should nurture and emotionally support the husband's ambitions and dreams more than her own, and that the wife is responsible for most family work" (p. 89). At the other end of the spectrum, role sharing husbands perceive child rearing and household tasks as a joint responsibility and are actively involved in doing their share. In comparison to traditional husbands, role sharing husbands are more likely to view their wives' interests as equal to their own and tend to have less traditional views about authority (Mintz & Mahalik, 1996). In comparison to role sharing husbands, traditional husbands report greater pressure to be successful, powerful, and competitive. There seems to be a greater emphasis on the breadwinner and provider role for traditional husbands.

The significance of the breadwinner role for men is maintained by societal descriptions of masculinity and male gender expectations (Granello & Navin, 1997). Such societal representation serves to

perpetuate inequalities in the family and ultimately in the workforce. As Lewis et al. (1992) argue, "where masculinity is socially constructed in this way, women have low expectations of assistance from their partners. Rather than expecting spousal support as of right, women are grateful for any instrumental or emotional support they do receive from their partner who, by virtue of their maleness, are not expected to provide either" (p. 7). Thus, as men in dual career families continue to expect women to conduct the majority of child care and household work, the impact of socialization can not be discredited. The discrepancy of role sharing between men and women may be explained in part by the social messages and expectations attached to each gender.

Regarding child rearing, Levine and Pittinsky (1997) found that as the number of dual career families increases, fathers are taking on more responsibility for the nurturing of their children as a result of necessity as well as choice. Men in dual career families must balance increasing household and child rearing responsibilities with the societal pressure to be the "breadwinner." In addition, Barnett and Rivers (1996) indicate that "fatherhood has become more central to the lives of men in dual earner couples, and critical to their emotional health. More men are willing to trade raises and promotions to spend time with their families" (p. 6).

Unfortunately, men aspiring to an egalitarian sharing of family responsibilities encounter resistance in a work environment that does not support such orientations (Kushnir et al., 1996). Such structural inflexibility contributes to stress experienced by both men and women in dual-career families. A systems perspective of family experiences recognizes the influence of social contexts on family functioning (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998).

As dual career families become a more dominant lifestyle, fathers are making more efforts to balance work and family responsibilities. Even though women tend to manage the majority of household and child rearing responsibilities, research indicates that men are becoming more active participants. Factors such as personal needs, social policy, and spousal support contribute to the amount of involvement a father has in child rearing responsibilities. The most significant predictor of level of involvement is attitudes about who has the responsibility to parent (Gilbert, 1985). Once again, value systems and

expectations determine the amount of role sharing within dual career families as well as the well-being of the families.

The Impact on Children

Another issue addressed in the literature is the impact of dual career families on children. While some argue that children and their care are being neglected as a result of dual career families (Hamburg, 1993), most mental health professionals and researchers assert that the negative impact on children is exaggerated and has been distorted in the media (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). For example, a study investigating college students' attitudes toward two paycheck families indicated that when compared with students from families with non-working mothers, students with working mothers did not report greater family discord and did not demonstrate a greater tendency to blame their mothers for childhood or current problems. The study found no support for "working mother" guilt and anxiety. Thus, working mothers did not have a negative on the social, intellectual, or academic aspects of children (Chambliss, 1996).

Furthermore, when comparing children of working mothers and children of homemaking mothers, there is minimal difference on developmental progress (Barnett & Rivers, 1996). Children, both sons and daughters, of working mothers tend to have less traditionally stereotyped attitudes about gender roles and expectations than do children of women who stay home (Gottfried et al., 1999). Consequently, maternal employment is not psychologically damaging to children despite the widespread arguments of such damage in previous years (Barnett & Rivers).

When addressing the impact on children, the most crucial factor of dual career families is the restriction of time for family involvement. Even though research shows that parents and children perceive spending more time together as crucial for improving family functioning, the pressures of dual careers result in parents spending increasingly less time with their families (Mattox, 1990). While adolescent children of dual career families tend to perceive the lifestyle positively and tend to experience their families as high in concern and supportiveness, the adolescents did identify time constraints as negative consequences of dual career family living (Knaub, 1986). Parcel and Menaghan (1994) found that although higher wages and employment in complex occupations benefited children's cognitive and social outcomes, a parent's high absorption in employment appears to impede vocabulary development in young children.

When parents worked long hours of overtime, children tended to develop behavioral problems. In dual career families, the decrease in resources such as time and involvement tend to have negative consequences on the cognitive and social development of children. Consequently, functional and well-balanced dual career couples are diligent in how they manage their time and in how they interact with their children.

As dual career families search for balance in work and family environments, it is imperative that time constraints do not negatively impact the development of children. As parents focus on their children, they need to be cognizant of the risk of spoiling their children (Ehrensaft, 1996). Parents may spoil their children inadvertently as they attempt to compensate for time constraints and low energy levels. A healthy involvement with family is fundamental to the well-being of the family as well as to the functioning of the children.

Implications for Family Therapy

As more families experience dual-career issues, clinicians are increasingly contacted by families encountering problems related to dual-career factors (Sperry, 1993). However, family therapy has minimally addressed the ramifications of dual-career lifestyles (Kushnir et al., 1996). Increased focus in the literature is necessary to match the increased demand of dual-career families. Dual-career families tend to seek counseling for multiple reasons such as time management, role overload, role cycling (shifting from work role to family role daily), developing a personal identity, competition for career accomplishments, and lack of intimacy (Brown et al., 1997; Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1984; Stoltz-Loike, 1992). The literature suggests that family therapists have three fundamental responsibilities for counseling dual-career families. Family therapists assist families in negotiating roles, values, and traditions; advocate for family support in the work environment; and, consult organizations about system dysfunctions (Shellenberger & Hoffman, 1995).

The dual career family is a system in constant transition as marital relationships develop, as children grow up, and as careers progress (Silberstein, 1992). Families who successfully manage the dual-career lifestyle are characterized by mutual acceptance, commitment, support, and compromise (Gilbert, 1987). These families recognize and support differences among members and actively involve themselves

in the family experience (Kushnir et al., 1996). Research indicates that flexibility, coping, and social support are fundamental factors contributing to emotional and physical well-being (Ulione, 1996).

Problem areas identified for dual career couples in counseling include role overload, balancing career and family demands, competition among spouses, achieving equity in relationship, division of labor, establishing social networks, time allocation, and child care responsibilities (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1998). Counselors will be expected to help dual career couples find resolution in the following areas: managing stress, accommodating aged parents, deciding about child rearing, matching career expectations, and struggling with role sharing (Gilbert, 1988).

When working with dual-career families, the goal of therapy is to develop a working family contract that incorporates each member's needs and feelings (Brown et al., 1997). Thus, the crucial issue is "to achieve relationship equity, which is a distinct balance between various aspects of partners' responsibilities that feels right to each member of the couple" (Stoltz-Loike, 1992, p. 106). To achieve this goal, the most significant intervention presented in the literature is helping families increase their awareness of changing role expectations, economic realities, and life choice alternatives (Alger, 1991).

Sperry (1993) encouraged clinicians to implement a protocol for matching and tailoring treatment for dual-career couples. The protocol develops out of a comprehensive assessment addressing areas such as situation/severity, system, skills, style/status, and suitability for treatment. For matching a couple with a therapeutic strategy, clinicians can focus on situation and severity factors. These factors can be operationalized in terms of marital conflict, discord, or dysfunction. Various levels of marital conflict demand different therapeutic strategies to maximize treatment. For tailoring treatment, Sperry encourages clinicians to focus on style and suitability for treatment dimensions. The protocol presented by Sperry provides a framework for clinicians to match and tailor their treatment for families with dual-career issues.

Themes in family counseling relating to dual-career families include boundaries between self and others (Stoltz-Loike, 1992), expectations about roles and responsibilities (Eldridge, 1996), shared decision making (Kushnir & Melamed, 1994), support (Ulione, 1996), and marital intimacy (Silberstein, 1992). The recognition and establishment of boundaries contributes to the development of differentiation of self within the family (Nichols & Schwartz, 1998). Additionally, Silberstein suggests that stress within dual-career

families is typically a product of incongruence between expectations and reality. The clinical issue becomes highlighting the expectations and encouraging the development of realities that more fully reflect individual needs, wants, and desires.

Throughout the counseling process, it is important to remember the significance of value systems and expectations. If spouses are not in agreement about work and family roles, conflict and tension develop (Granello & Navin, 1997). Conflict and tensions subsequently compromises the feelings of satisfaction, support, and well-being within the family. In the counseling relationship, it is imperative to explore gender expectations and to revise more equitable and mutually satisfying role sharing if necessary. "The gender-linked pair of expectations represents an important core of the dual-career marriage. For some couples and in some aspects of dual-career family life, this gender-linked dichotomy continues to characterize the work-family system. For other couples and in other domains of the dual-career family, the dichotomy is being challenged, and traditional gender scripts are being revised and rewritten" (Silberstein, 1992, p. 48).

During the counseling process, traditional and emergent views about gender roles should be explored as they pertain to dual career relationships. Gender encompasses both the individual as well as the social structures (Eldridge, 1996). Dual-career families arrive in therapy concerned about the stress created by daily, concrete experiences such as division of household labor or development of work schedules. Silberstein (1992) argues that these daily challenges echo deeper issues such as gender equality, whose career is more important, and who is responsible for the family. Hence, both internal and external processes need to be addressed as the counselor looks for underlying themes of daily concerns.

Shared decision making is another critical factor in dual-career families. Shared decision making in the home promotes healthier and greater well-being than individual decision making (Kushnir & Melamed, 1994). Individuals with higher levels of perceived control tend to have lower levels of role overload (Duxbury et al., 1994). Perceived control and shared decision making are similar concepts that can be addressed in family counseling. Counselors can encourage shared decision making, thereby enhancing perceived control and emotional well-being.

Furthermore, the literature highlights the importance of receiving support from spouses and from external sources (Kushnir et al., 1996; Lee & Duxbury, 1998; Ulione, 1996). A support network provides emotional and practical support for balancing demands of work and family. In counseling, the level of marital intimacy should be investigated. Marital intimacy, especially sexual relations, tends to be a problem area for dual career couples. The focus of dual career couples tends to be making time to spend with their children. The emphasis on work and relationship with children restricts the amount of energy and time reserved for the marital relationship (Silberstein, 1992). Partners should be encouraged to set aside specific time to cultivate their marital relationship. Tools for balancing the time and energy demands of family and work should be incorporated into the counseling process (Stoltz-Loike, 1992). By enhancing support networks and marital intimacy, the amount of supportiveness experienced by dual-career families is increased exponentially.

In response to the variables described above, coping mechanisms effectively moderate the impact of role strain and overload on well-being in dual-career families (Paden & Buehler, 1995). The coping skills of planning and cognitive restructuring are especially salient in minimizing impact on well-being for women, whereas restructuring and withdrawing effectively buffer men's levels of distress. Counselors can enhance coping skills within dual-career families by educating all members about effective communication, conflict resolution, stress management, and time management skills.

Gilbert (1984) describes a four step model for addressing issues faced by dual career couples. The first step involves helping spouses to differentiate between the external, structural aspects and the internal, sociopsychological aspects of problems. In the second step, spouses are encouraged to explore the impact of socialization on individual values and beliefs. The emphasis is placed on recognizing how societal norms influence daily interactions, behaviors, feelings, and thoughts. Once spouses understand the impact of socialization, they are more prepared to identify their own values and beliefs. The third step focuses on parenting and expectations for child rearing. Spouses have an opportunity to explore their own thoughts and expectations as well as an opportunity to resolve any conflicting expectations with partners. The fourth step is educational in nature as it provides information about the characteristics of dual career families and the coping strategies used by other couples.

Within the framework of family therapy, it is assumes that families are negotiating to find a balance of roles and responsibilities that incorporates the needs and emotions of all family members (Stoltz-Loike, 1992). Counselors act as supporters and encouragers as family members struggle to recognize their current expectations and family rules and to adapt their behavior to enhance family harmony.

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